

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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SUBJ: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. LABOR AGITATION AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE GOC AND THE COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED LABOR CONFEDERATION CSTC OVERSHADOWED OTHER DOMESTIC POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS DURING THE WEEK. THE LACK OF A CONSENSUS IN THE FOREIGN RELATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE UNDERSCORED ONCE MORE COLOMBIA'S DILEMMA RE CUBA; IE, THE GOC FAVORS SOME RESTORATION OF TIES WITH CUBA BUT NOT AT THE COST OF DAMAGE TO THE INTER-AMERICAN SYSTEM. CONGRESS WAS NOT IN SESSION AND SOME COLOMBIANS WERE STILL ON VACATION. PRESIDENT LOPEZ'S DECISION TO CONVOKE AN EXTRAORDINARY SESSION OF CONGRESS FORESHADOWED A RETURN TO A HIGHER LEVEL OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY. END SUMMARY

2. COMMUNIST-LED LABOR CONFEDERATION DENOUNCES LABOR MINISTER. THE BANCO GANADERO EMPLOYEES STRIKE, WHICH BEGAN JAN 8, (BOGOTA 0322) ENTERED ITS SECOND WEEK WITH INDICATIONS THAT THE POSITIONS OF THE EMPLOYER, GOC, AND UNIONS WERE POLARIZING. LABOR MIN DE CROVO SPEAKING IN MEDELLIN JAN 10 ACCUSED THE COMMUNIST-LED TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION OF COLOMBIAN WORKERS (CSTC) OF ATTEMPTING TO BRING DOWN THE LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION
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THROUGH A SERIES OF COORDINATED STRIKES (BOGOTA 370). SUBSEQUEN-

TLY, SHE REFUSED "ABSOLUTELY" TO INTERCEDE IN THE STRIKE UNTIL THE EMPLOYEES RETURNED TO WORK, BUT DECLINED TO ALLOW THE BANK MANAGEMENT TO FIRE THE LEADERS OR IMPOSE OTHER DISCIPLINARY MEASURES AGAINST THE STRIKERS, HOPING TO AVOID SYMPATHY WALKOUTS BY UNIONS IN OTHER BANKS. THIS TACTIC, HOWEVER, APPARENTLY FAILED WHEN THE BANK EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION (ACEB) AND THE BANK EMPLOYEES UNION (UNEB) ANNOUNCED A 24-HOUR WORK STOPPAGE IN BOGOTA BY SEVERAL OTHER STATE BANK UNIONS. THE MINISTER MAINTAINED THAT THE GOC POSITION WOULD NOT CHANGE -- "NO NEGOTIATIONS WHILE THE STRIKERS WERE IN AN ILLEGAL STATUS" -- AND DEPARTED FOR CALI JAN 17 FOR A 3-DAY SEMINAR ON SOCIAL SECURITY.

COMMENT: THE MAOIST-LED ACEB AS WELL AS THE COLOMBIAN TEACHERS FEDERATION (FECODEGE RECENTLY AFFILIATED WITH THE CSTC, THUS UNIFYING STRUCTURALLY IF NOT POLITICALLY MUCH OF THE COMMUNIST-LED SECTOR OF THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT. ADDITIONAL STRIKES SIMILAR TO THE BANKWORKERS STRIKE, INVOLVING UNDOUBTEDLY POLITICAL, ANTI-LOPEZ OVERTONES AS WELL AS LEGITIMATE TRADITIONAL TRADE UNION SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC GOALS, MAY BE EXPECTED TO OCCUR IN THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS, BUILDING UP TO THE CSTC-SPONSORED UNITY CONGRESS SCHEDULED FOR LATE MARCH. THE MIN'S REMARKS IN MEDELLIN AND INTRANSIGENCE IS PROBABLY IN RECOGNITION THAT GOC ACQUIESCENCE TO THE BANKWORKERS MIGHT LEAD TO EVEN MORE MILITANCY AMONG UNIONS OF THE RADICAL LEFT. THE LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION MAY FIND ITSELF FORCED INTO CRACKING DOWN ON THE CSTC AND AFFILIATES, PERHAPS EVEN WITHDRAWING THE LEGAL STATUS OF THE CSTC SO RECENTLY GRANTED Y LOPEZ. INTERESTINGLY, THE LAB MIN, WHO WAS THOUGHT TO BE SYMPATHETIC GENERALLY TO THE OPERATIONAL MILITANCY OF THE CSTC, ALTHOUGH NOG NECESSARILY TO ITS POLITICAL GOALS, NOW FINDS HERSELF LABELED IN THE COMMUNIST PARTY'S WEEKLY VOZ PROLETARIA AS A "REACTIONARY ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE".

3. CUBAN QUESTION: THE JANUARY 13 MEETING OF THE FOREIGN RELATIONS ADVISORY COMMITTEE, CALLED BY FONMIN LIEVANO TO CONSIDER THE QUESTION OF FUTURE RELATINSHIPS WITH CUBA, DID NOT RESULT IN ANY DEPARTURES IN COLOMBIAN POLICIES TOWARD THE CASTRO REGIME. ALTHOUGH THE DELIBERATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE ARE CONFIDENTIAL, BOTH PRESS REPORTS AND A NUMBER OF EMBASSY CONTACTS INDICATE THAT FOUR OF THE SIX MEMBERS OPPOSE RESTORATION OF RELATIONS WITH CUBA. THE COMMISSION MEMBERS, IN COMMON WITH OTHER LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GOC OFFICIALS, REPORTEDLY PLACE A HIGHER PREMIUM ON MAINTAINING THE VIABILITY OF THE OAS THAN ON THE RENEWAL OF RELATIONS WITH CUBA. THE GOC ACCORDINGLY CONTINUES TO SEARCH FOR A FORMULA THAT WILL PROVIDE AN END TO THE CUBAN SANCTIONS AND THE RETENTION OF THE INTER-AMERICAN SECURITY MECHANISM AND NEGOTIATING FORUM.

4. EXTRAORDINARY SESSION OF CONGRESS: PRESIDENT LOPEZ ANNOUNCED ON JAN 16 HIS INTENTION OF CONVOKING A SPECIAL SESSION OF CONGRESS

IN FEBRUARY. THE PURPOSE OF THE SESSION WILL BE TO OBTAIN PASSAGE OF THE BILL RESTRUCTURING THE OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER GENERAL. THE BILL, PASSED BY THE SENATE DURING THE PAST SESSION OF CONGRESS, FAILED TO PASS THE HOUSE, DUE REPORTEDLY TO INEPT HANDLING BY THE BILL'S FLOOR MANAGERS. SINCE THE CONSTITUTION LIMITS THE ACTIVITIES OF A SPECIAL SESSION TO THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH IT IS CONVOKED THE CONGRESS WILL NOT BE EMPOWERED TO INVESTIGATE RECENT ALLEGATIONS OF IRREGULARITIES MADE CONCERNING THE COMPTROLLER'S OFFICE OR TO REPLACE ANY OF THE PRINCIPALS OF THAT OFFICE. SUCCESSFUL PASSAGE OF THE REORGANIZATION BILL WILL HOWEVER ALLOW CONGRESS, IN ITS REGULAR SESSION, STARTING JULY 20, TO IMPLEMENT CHANGES IN THE COMPTROLLER'S OFFICE.

5. DEATH OF GENERAL ROJAS PINILLA. GENERAL GUSTAVO ROJAS PINILLA, THE ONLY DICTATOR IN COLOMBIA'S MODERN HISTORY, DIED ON JAN 17. THE 74 YEAR OLD ROJAS, WHO IN RECENT YEARS HAD HEADED HIS OWN POLITICAL PARTY, THE NATIONAL POPULAR ALLIANCE (ANAPO) HAD BEEN IN POOR HEALTH FOR SEVERAL YEARS. HIS MEDICAL PROBLEMS HAD CAUSED HIM TO WITHDRAW IN FAVOR OF HIS DAUGHTER AS ANAPO'S 1973 PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. THE GENERAL'S DEATH WILL BE ANOTHER SERIOUS BLOW FOR THE ALREADY MORIBUND ANAPO.
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